



Cutting through the Static on Hospital Finance: Sample Questions for Reporters and Researchers

Question: How is your hospital organized: public, for-profit, or non-profit?

Follow-up questions:

- Does your hospital have an express commitment (e.g. a mission statement) to provide benefits to the community it serves? If so, who is responsible for developing and carrying it out?
- Can you describe what, if any, additional obligations the hospital has to provide care to patients regardless of their ability to pay, or to provide additional benefits to the community?

Question: How does the hospital generate revenue? What are its biggest expenses?

Follow-up questions:

- What was the hospital's profit margin last year?
- How much did the hospital provide in charity care/financial assistance, excluding bad debt? Medicaid shortfall? Other community benefit programs? Please provide these numbers at cost.
- What percentage of the hospital's operating expenses do these numbers represent?
- What percentage of your patients are privately insured? Medicare beneficiaries? Medicaid/State Children's Health Insurance Program? Self-pay (uninsured, underinsured)?
- Does the hospital receive public funding to help cover the costs of caring for undeserved people, such as uninsured or Medicaid-eligible patients?
- If non-profit: What is the estimated value of your hospital's tax exemption?

Question: How would you describe the community you serve?

Follow-up questions:

- What are the top health needs of your community? Is access to health care an issue?
- What steps has your hospital taken to address community needs?
- Does the hospital use a formal process to assess and address the needs of its community? If so, what have you learned from that process?
- Do you involve vulnerable populations and other partners in community benefit planning?

Question: How does your hospital help patients who have difficulty affording medical care?

Follow-up questions:

- Do you have a written financial assistance policy? What does it cover?
- Who is eligible for financial assistance under your policy? What must patients do to apply?
- How does the hospital inform patients and the public about financial assistance?
- What collection practices are used for self-pay patients who have not paid their bills?
- Can you describe what, if any, steps the hospital will take to work with patients who do not qualify for financial assistance but cannot afford to pay their bill in full?
- What percentage of the hospital's bad debt cases do you believe might actually be eligible for charity care/financial assistance?

You may also want to ask the hospital for copies of the following materials:

IRS Form 990 (non-profit) or state tax filings

Debt collection policies

Financial assistance policies

Community benefit reports

Financial assistance application forms

Audited financial statements